



Fine Dining Returns to the Earth



Guests and the environment both receive the royal treatment at the Four Seasons Hotel in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. By focusing on behind the scenes operations, such as food waste management, the hotel is preserving environmental resources and saving money without compromising the guest experience.

A Cost-Effective, Closed-Loop Composting Partnership

A 2006 waste audit at the Four Seasons Hotel in Philadelphia indicated that its recycling program, which included paper, cardboard, bottles, and cans, only captured three to five percent of the hotel's waste by weight, due to the large quantity of high-weight food waste in the waste stream. To the Four Seasons, a five percent recycling rate was not acceptable. As Director of Engineering Marvin Dixon explains, "We strive for perfection." To increase the recovery rate, the hotel established a kitchen scraps recycling program with local composter Ned Foley of the farm Two Particular Acres. Here's how it works:

Black composting bins stand close to each kitchen work station, along with blue recycling bins and gray trash cans. The staff deposits all of the kitchen's organic discards—food scraps plus paper, cardboard, and biodegradable packaging, napkins, and dishware—into the composting bins. At the end of each day, the bins are loaded into a truck that Dixon drives 35 miles to Two Particular Acres on his way home from work. The truck runs on biodiesel made from Four Seasons' used cooking oils. Dixon drives the empty bins back to the hotel the next morning. In the program's first year, Four Seasons worked with two different contractors to transport the organic waste to Two Particular Acres. Due to rising fuel costs, both companies discontinued this hauling service. When Four Seasons couldn't find a replacement hauler, Dixon decided to transport the material to the farm to ensure that the program continued.

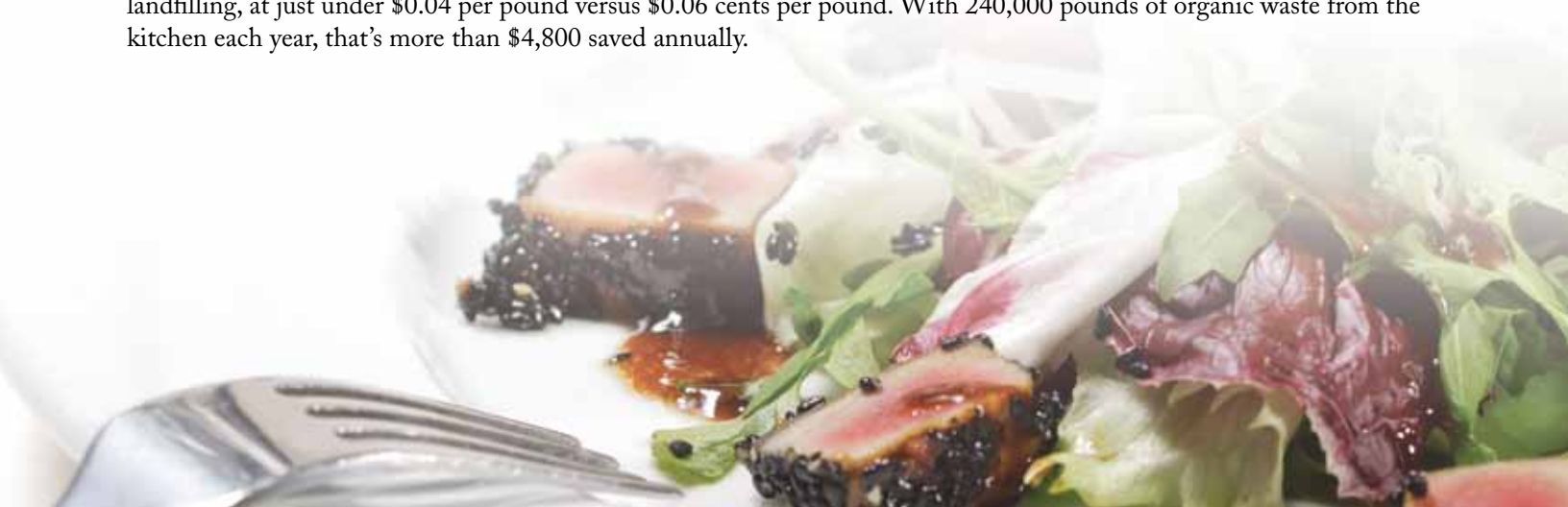
At Two Particular Acres, Farmer Foley uses the kitchen scraps from Four Seasons to make compost, which Four Seasons then purchases for its gardens and landscapes.

This symbiotic, closed-loop system fulfills the needs of both parties, and it's cost-effective too. Four Seasons rents each 150 lb kitchen composting bin for \$40 per month. The hotel pays Two Particular Acres \$35 per ton of organic waste in addition to a monthly service fee. In total, sending waste for composting is 30 percent cheaper for the hotel than landfilling, at just under \$0.04 per pound versus \$0.06 cents per pound. With 240,000 pounds of organic waste from the kitchen each year, that's more than \$4,800 saved annually.

BENEFITS OF

► COMPOSTING

- By composting instead of landfilling its kitchen scraps, Four Seasons keeps 52 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent out of the atmosphere each year, an emissions reduction tantamount to decreasing the annual consumption of oil by 110 barrels.
- Composting saves the Four Seasons \$4,800 each year, a 30 percent savings over landfilling its food scraps.



Carrying the Message

Dixon explains, “The kitchen is the nucleus of the [recycling] operation.” Program success hinges on the kitchen staff separating organic materials from the other waste and depositing organics into the compost bins. This is no easy task, as the kitchen operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with three supervisors managing three large teams on three shifts. Dixon identified three factors necessary for success.

Hotel Management Support:

“The General Manager and Executive Committee have to be behind the program 110 percent” for employees at all levels to feel accountable for the success of the program, said Dixon. Composting is one piece of the hotel’s broad environmental strategy, and the hotel is very supportive of this effort.

Personal Investment:

Employees learn about the environmental benefits of composting, fostering a personal investment which motivates them to be extra vigilant when separating waste.

Education:

Program instructions are incorporated into new employee orientation, so that the staff views the program for what it is, an integral part of kitchen operations.

It took two months for the program to take hold in the kitchen, but after the initial effort, it became easy to monitor the bins and keep everyone on board. As Dixon explains, “People have to carry the message to make sure it happens; that’s the success right there.”

To encourage others to establish successful food scrap collections like that at Four Seasons, Farmer Foley is a primary trainer for EPA’s Campaign to Mid-Atlantic State Farmers to Promote Organic Material Composting, a free, peer-to-peer training program to help farmers start composting commercial kitchen discards. Other agencies such as the Pennsylvania DEP and the USDA are offering grants to educate farmers and to assist with the initial costs of purchasing composting equipment.

You Can Help

Help your business start its own kitchen discards composting program.

- Visit www.epa.gov/foodscraps
- Search for composters in your area at www.findacomposter.com

STEPS TO

▶ LESS WASTE

In addition to composting organics from the kitchen, the Four Seasons Dining Services:

- 🌀 *Carefully tracks food purchases to minimize surplus food (source reduction)*
- 🌀 *Purchases local ingredients whenever possible*
- 🌀 *Makes biodiesel from used cooking oils*
- 🌀 *Purchases only biodegradable disposables*
- 🌀 *Uses table-size, reusable condiment containers instead of serving-size disposables*
- 🌀 *Buys back the finished compost to use on its landscapes*

In total, Four Seasons in Philadelphia has reduced its landfill waste by 23% (239 tons)



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460
www.epa.gov

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